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Unhealthiest and Healthiest Free Airline Snacks

The Daily Meal unwraps the nutritional value of free airline snacks

December 31, 2013 | 10:17 AM By [Lauren Mack \(/users/lauren-mack/contact\)](#), Writer



While most airlines now offer buy-on-board snack boxes and sandwiches, there's something almost irresistible about free food, even if it's just a palm-size snack pack.

TODAY ON THE DAILY MEAL



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“Fried” Catfish with Potato Sticks

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It's harder and harder to find **free in-flight amenities**

(<http://www.thedailymeal.com/which-us-airlines-still-offer-free-amenities>) like hot meals, snacks, and pillows and blankets, but a handful of U.S. airlines still offer free in-flight snacks.

Click here to see the Unhealthiest and Healthiest Free Airline Snacks (Slideshow)

(<http://www.thedailymeal.com/unhealthiest-and-healthiest-free-airline-snacks-slideshow>)

From the once-ubiquitous salted peanuts and pretzels still served complimentary on **AirTran Airways**

(<http://www.airtran.com/>), **Delta Air Lines** (<http://www.delta.com/>), and **Southwest Airlines** (<http://www.southwest.com/>) to Pau Hana Snack Mix and Hawaiian Sweet Maui Onion Potato Chips on **Hawaiian Airlines** (<http://www.hawaiianairlines.com/>), frequent



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fliers don't always have to fly the hungry skies. But which of these snacks is the healthiest and which is the unhealthiest? The results may just surprise you.

The Daily Meal contacted all the major U.S. air carriers and requested the nutrition information for each airline's snacks that are served free of charge to all passengers on domestic routes. **Allegiant Air** (<http://www.allegiantair.com/>) , **American Airlines** (<https://www.aa.com/>) , **Frontier Airlines** (<http://www.flyfrontier.com/>) , **Spirit Airlines** (<http://www.spirit.com/>) , **US Airways** (<http://www.usairways.com/>) , **United Airlines** (<http://www.united.com/>) , and **Virgin America** (<http://www.virginamerica.com/>) no longer serve free snacks; their buy on-board options were not examined for this story.

Gone are the days when nearly every U.S. airline served hot meals or sandwiches. And in the last decade, legroom and complimentary pillows, blankets, and snacks started disappearing, too.

American Airlines stopped serving complimentary snacks in 2009, according to Nina Green, a public relations representative for the airline. In March 2011, Continental Airlines, which merged with United Airlines, **stopped serving pretzels and Biscoff cookies** ([NBC News \(](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/41888897/ns/travel-travel_tips/#.UsGQaZSgmp8)

Despite the cuisine cutbacks, it's comforting to know that a handful of air carriers still serve free pre-packaged snacks to each passenger, regardless of seat number or membership status with the airline. [slideshow:

AirTran Airways (which is owned by Southwest Airlines), Delta Air Lines, Hawaiian Airlines, **JetBlue** (<http://www.jetblue.com/>) , and Southwest Airlines all serve free in-flight snacks.

After The Daily Meal collected the nutritional information of each airline's snacks, we consulted registered dietician Marissa Lippert, founder of **Nourish NYC** (<http://nourish-nyc.com/>) , a Manhattan nutrition counseling firm, and owner of **NOURISH Kitchen + Table** (<http://www.nourishkitchentable.com/>) , a West Village takeaway food shop and café.

Lippert examined the nutrition information for each snack, evaluating, by airline, "how to get the biggest bang for the nutritional buck." Then, she shared the unhealthiest and healthiest options with us.

"Even though it may be free, it may not be the best option," said Lippert of the free snacks.

While most airlines now offer buy-on-board snack boxes and sandwiches, there's something almost irresistible about free food, even if it's just a palm-size snack pack.

While Dr. Charles Platkin, of **DietDetective.com** (<http://dietdetective.com/>) , Hunter College, and City University of New York School of Public Health, recently released his annual **Airline Snacking and Onboard Food Service Survey** (<http://www.dietdetective.com/weekly-column/dietdetectivecom-annual-airline-snacking-and-onboard-food-service-survey-health-rati-o>) , which evaluated 12 major airlines' snack and on-board food offerings, the survey only examined snacks and meals for purchase. The Daily Meal's list is solely devoted to free snacks and we've provided the nutrition label information for each healthiest and unhealthiest choice.

While some flight attendants, like those on JetBlue, are more than happy to dole out extra free snacks, keep this in mind: passengers who opt for chips and cookies are more likely to want an additional snack to satisfy their hunger, while those who consume a more nutritiously dense snack, like peanuts, are not likely to experience food cravings after snacking, said Lippert.

Before you put down your tray table, see the **Unhealthiest and Healthiest Free Airline Snacks slideshow** (<http://www.thedailymeal.com/unhealthiest-and-healthiest-free-airline-snacks-slideshow>) .

Unhealthiest and Healthiest Free Airline Snacks (Slideshow)



Slide 1 of 10

Delta Air Lines' Unhealthiest Snack: Biscoff Cookies

The Belgian "speculoos" short-crust biscuits feature a distinct caramelized taste with a hint of cinnamon and spice. Until recently, these crunchy cookies had been served on most U.S. air carriers since the 1980s, but now only Delta Air Lines serves them for free to all passengers. Despite the dwindling opportunity to taste these cookies, more than 90 million Biscoff cookies are still served domestically in-flight each year, according to **Biscoff** (<http://www.biscoff.com/indulge/biscoff-cookies>) . Delta offers its passengers three choices of snacks — peanuts, pretzels, and Biscoff cookies. Of the three, the unhealthiest option is Biscoff cookies because they are highest in calories, saturated fat, and sugar.

Nutrition Info:

Calories: 150

Calories From Fat: 53

Total Fat: 6 grams

Saturated Fat: 3 grams

Trans Fat: 0 grams

Cholesterol: 0 milligrams

Sodium: 120 milligrams

Total Carbohydrate: 23 grams

Dietary Fiber: .4 grams

Sugar: 12 grams

Protein: 2 grams

**Nutrition information provided by Delta Air Lines and snack packaging.*

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Unhealthiest and Healthiest Free Airline Snacks (Slideshow)



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Delta Air Lines' Healthiest Snack: Salted Peanuts

Of the three free snack choices Delta offers its passengers — peanuts, pretzels, and Biscoff cookies — peanuts are the healthiest snack. "Peanuts are always my number one choice," said Lippert. She says peanuts are filling, contain healthy fat, and a small amount will fill up hungry travelers. Lippert recommends pairing peanuts with a bottle of water to help fight water retention, which comes from air travel and eating salty food.

Nutrition Info:

Calories: 70

Calories From Fat: Not Provided

Total Fat: 6 grams

Saturated Fat: 1 gram

Trans Fat: 0 grams

Cholesterol: 0 milligrams

Sodium: 95 milligrams

Total Carbohydrate: 2 grams

Dietary Fiber: 1 gram

Sugar: 0 gram

Protein: 3 grams

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**Nutrition information provided by Delta Air Lines and snack packaging*

Unhealthiest and Healthiest Free Airline Snacks (Slideshow)



jet Blue

Slide 3 of 10

JetBlue's Unhealthiest Snack: Linden's Chocolate Chippers

When it comes to free snacking, JetBlue offers the most variety. The airline's flight attendants march through the aisle with a large basket brimming with at least a half dozen regular offerings that include Doritos, King Nut Fancy Nut Mix, Linden's Chocolate Choppers, PopCorners kettle-popped corn chips, Stauffer's Animal Crackers (original), and TERRA BLUES, plus seasonal offerings like Linden's Butter Crunchers, Stauffer's Animal Crackers (iced), and TERRA SWEETS & BLUES. The flight attendants will even give you a second snack for free, but before you grab a second bag, note that not all the snacks are equally healthy. Linden's Chocolate Chippers are the unhealthiest choice. With 2 grams of saturated fat and 11 grams of sugar, these bite-size chocolate chip cookies are the only snack option, along with the seasonal Linden's Butter Crunchers, that contains cholesterol.

Nutrition Info:

Calories: 135

Calories From Fat: 45

Total Fat: 5 grams

Saturated Fat: 2 grams

Trans Fat: 0 grams

Cholesterol: 5 milligrams

Sodium: 100 milligrams

Total Carbohydrate: 20 grams

Dietary Fiber: 1 gram

Sugar: 11 grams

Protein: 1 gram

**Nutrition information provided by JetBlue.*

Unhealthiest and Healthiest Free Airline Snacks (Slideshow)



jet Blue

Slide 4 of 10

JetBlue's Healthiest Snack: King Nut Fancy Nut Mix

While JetBlue doesn't offer free peanuts, one of its snack offerings is King Nut Fancy Nut Mix, which is packed with salted almonds, cashews, and honey-roasted sesame sticks. The savory snack is the best option for travelers who are truly hungry. Despite having the highest calorie, fat, and sodium content of JetBlue's offerings, the fat is from good sources, says Lippert.

For those who can't eat nuts or who aren't very hungry but want something to nosh on, the TERRA BLUES, and when seasonally offered TERRA SWEETS & BLUES Sea Salt, are a healthy second choice. Made from blue potatoes, the bluish-purple chips have a slightly nutty flavor (the TERRA SWEETS & BLUES variety is gluten-free and also contains orange colored sweet potato chips). Not only do the chips have more fiber than other snacks like PopCorners (also a gluten-free offering), they are also made from a vegetable.

Nutrition Info: King Nut Fancy Nut Mix

Calories: 170

Calories From Fat: 130

Total Fat: 14 grams

Saturated Fat: 1.4 grams

Trans Fat: 0 grams

Cholesterol: 0 milligrams

Sodium: 180 milligrams

Total Carbohydrate: 8 grams

Dietary Fiber: 2 grams

Sugar: 1 gram

Protein: 5 grams

Nutrition Info: TERRA BLUES

Calories: 130

Calories From Fat: 50

Total Fat: 6 grams

Saturated Fat: 1 gram

Trans Fat: 0 grams

Cholesterol: 0 milligrams

Sodium: 115 milligrams

Total Carbohydrate: 19 grams

Dietary Fiber: 3 grams

Sugar: 0 grams

Protein: 2 grams

*Nutrition information provided by JetBlue.

Unhealthiest and Healthiest Free Airline Snacks (Slideshow)



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Southwest Airlines’ Unhealthiest Snack: Wheat Thins and Ritz Toasted Chips

On most Southwest Airlines’ flights, passengers are offered salted or honey-roasted peanuts, pretzels, and, on some routes, Nabisco snacks like original Wheat Thins, Airplane Cookies, and Ritz Toasted Chips. The unhealthiest options are the seemingly healthy Wheat Thins, which are baked, whole-grain square crackers, and Ritz Toasted Chips, which, as the name suggests, are toasted, not fried; however, both are examples of how 100-calorie packaged snacks aren’t always the best choice. Lippert explains it’s better to choose a snack that has higher fat and calories that is a natural, wholesome food that will fill you up rather than empty-calorie snacks.

Nutrition Info: Wheat Thins

- Calories: 100
- Calories From Fat: Not Provided
- Total Fat: 4 grams
- Saturated Fat: 1 gram
- Trans Fat: 0 grams
- Cholesterol: 0 milligrams
- Sodium: 160 milligrams
- Total Carbohydrate: 15 grams
- Dietary Fiber: 1 gram
- Sugar: 3 grams
- Protein: 1 gram

Nutrition Info: Ritz Toasted Chips

- Calories: 100
- Calories From Fat: Not Provided
- Total Fat: 3 grams
- Saturated Fat: 0 grams
- Trans Fat: 0 grams
- Cholesterol: 0 milligrams
- Sodium: 190 milligrams
- Total Carbohydrate: 18 grams
- Dietary Fiber: 0 grams
- Sugar: 2 grams
- Protein: 1 gram

**Nutrition information provided by
MyFitnessPal.com
(<http://www.myfitnesspal.com/>) .*

Unhealthiest and Healthiest Free Airline Snacks (Slideshow)

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Southwest Airlines' Healthiest Snack: Salted Peanuts

The healthiest free snack on Southwest is the salted peanuts. "Peanuts are always my number one choice," says Lippert, because peanuts are filling, contain healthy fat, and a small amount will fill up hungry travelers. On some routes, Southwest also offers honey-roasted peanuts. If you have a choice between salted and honey-roasted, go for salted; the honey roasted have added sugar, says Lippert.

Nutrition Info:

Calories: 70

Calories From Fat: Not Provided

Total Fat: 6 grams

Saturated Fat: 1 gram

Trans Fat: 0 grams

Cholesterol: 0 milligrams

Sodium: 95 milligrams

Total Carbohydrate: 2 grams

Dietary Fiber: 1 gram

Sugar: 0 grams

Protein: 3 grams

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**Nutrition information provided by
MyFitnessPal.com
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Unhealthiest and Healthiest Free Airline Snacks (Slideshow)

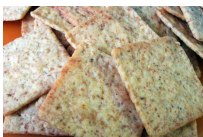
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AirTran Airways' Unhealthiest Snack: Mini Pretzels



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AirTran Airways' Unhealthiest Snack: Mini Pretzels

AirTran Airways, whose parent company is Southwest Airlines, serves the same King Nut-distributed salted peanuts and salted mini pretzels that are served on Southwest. With only two options, the mini salted pretzels are the unhealthiest choice. While a bag of mini pretzels contains fewer calories than the salted peanuts, the mini pretzels have much more sodium. Plus, nuts are an all-natural snack; pretzels aren't.

Nutrition Info:

Calories: 45

Calories From Fat: 5

Total Fat: .5 grams

Saturated Fat: 0 grams

Trans Fat: 0 grams

Cholesterol: 0 milligrams

Sodium: 170 milligrams

Total Carbohydrate: 10 grams

Dietary Fiber: 0 grams

Sugar: 0 grams

Protein: 1 gram

**Nutrition information provided by*

MyFitnessPal.com

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Unhealthiest and Healthiest Free Airline Snacks (Slideshow)



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AirTran Airways
Healthiest Snack:
Salted Peanuts

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AirTran Airways' Healthiest Snack: Salted Peanuts

Just like the peanuts served on its parent company, Southwest Airlines, the healthiest free snack on AirTran is the salted peanuts. The all-natural snack is filling, contains healthy fat, and a small amount will fill up hungry travelers.

Nutrition Info:

Calories: 70

Calories From Fat: Not Provided

Total Fat: 6 grams

Saturated Fat: 1 gram

Trans Fat: 0 grams

Cholesterol: 0 milligrams

Sodium: 95 milligrams

Total Carbohydrate: 2 grams

Dietary Fiber: 1 gram

Sugar: 0 grams

Protein: 3 grams

**Nutrition information provided by
MyFitnessPal.com
(<http://www.myfitnesspal.com/>).*

Unhealthiest and Healthiest Free Airline Snacks (Slideshow)



Hawaiian Airlines

Hawaiian Airlines' Unhealthiest Snack: Hawaiian Sweet Maui Onion Potato Chips



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Hawaiian Airlines' Unhealthiest Snack: Hawaiian Sweet Maui Onion Potato Chips

Hawaiian Airlines' gets its passengers in an island state of mind with a duo of free snack options: Hawaiian Sweet Maui Onion Potato Chips and Pau Hana Snack Mix. The unhealthiest option is the golden-colored, kettle-cooked onion chips. Pair them with the complimentary Koloa Breeze Rum Punch Cocktail and you may have to spend more time in the gym than on the beach.

Nutrition Info:

Calories: 140

Calories From Fat: 70

Total Fat: 9 grams

Saturated Fat: 2 grams

Trans Fat: 0 grams

Cholesterol: 0 milligrams

Sodium: 120 milligrams

Total Carbohydrate: 15 grams

Dietary Fiber: 1 gram

Sugar: 2 grams

Protein: 1 gram

**Nutrition information provided by Hawaiian Airlines.*

Unhealthiest and Healthiest Free Airline Snacks (Slideshow)



Hawaiian Airlines



Hawaiian Airlines'
Healthiest Snack:
Pau Hana Snack Mix

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Hawaiian Airlines' Healthiest Snack: Pau Hana Snack Mix

Pau Hana Snack Mix is a healthier option than the Hawaiian Sweet Maui Onion Potato Chips. The mix of roasted and salted almonds, Cheddar corn sticks, corn chips with flax, and Cheddar rice triangles is a better choice because it has more protein than the kettle-cooked chips, says Lippert.

Nutrition Info:

Calories: 70

Calories From Fat: 35

Total Fat: 4 grams

Saturated Fat: 0 grams

Trans Fat: 0 grams

Cholesterol: 0 milligrams

Sodium: 70 milligrams

Total Carbohydrate: 8 grams

Dietary Fiber: 1 gram

Sugar: 0 grams

Protein: 2 grams

**Nutrition information provided by Hawaiian Airlines.*